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Galleries—Downtown

Jack Smith

By Andrea K. Scott July 16, 2018



"Jack Smith: Art Crust of Spiritual Oasis" at Artists Space
Photo courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York and

There is more to Jack Smith than "Flaming Creatures," the pangender fever dream of a B movie he directed in 1963, which drew obscenity charges (eventually dropped) and inspired Susan Sontag to write "Notes on Camp." For the next twenty-five years, the obstreperous artist, who died of AIDS-related pneumonia in 1989, worked in decreasingly stable conditions, making films, slide shows, and performances of exquisitely pointed artifice, in which extravagantly gowned landlords have lobster claws instead of hands and a crumbling loft is the apotheosis of glamour. It's impossible to imagine so much of the culture we still call "downtown"—from Nan Goldin's "Ballad of Sexual Dependency" to "RuPaul's Drag Race"—without Smith's sweet, bitter genius. Artists Space bids farewell to its (fittingly) provisional gallery, before relocating to a permanent home one block south, with the exhibition "Jack Smith: Art Crust of Spiritual Oasis," through September, 9.